

on Health did have at least seven hearings, full-blown hearings, on the matter at hand today, and the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health had over 15 hearings, including four to six seminars for all of the Members involved. So to hear from the other side that there was no hearing whatsoever is not, in fact, the case.

At this time, I would like to yield 6 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), the distinguished chairwoman of the Committee on Rules and a leading advocate for children and seniors in this country, from a State that is renowned for its progressive health care institutions.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlelady for yielding me the time.

Madam Speaker, I want to say that I am enormously proud of the accomplishments that we can credit to the Democratic-led Congress. From education to health care, from national security to increasing the minimum wage, great strides have been taken to make our country stronger, healthier, and better prepared for the future. And there is more to come.

But it is with special pride that I rise today, because I feel that what motivated me, and so many of my colleagues, to come to Washington in the first place was the thought that on any day a vote could be held that would improve the lives of millions of people throughout our beloved country.

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And that is exactly the chance that we have been given today, the chance to vote for a bill that will improve medical care in the country, improve the health of our citizens, and offer new hope for literally millions of children who would otherwise be left with neither.

Madam Speaker, I think that everyone listening today recognizes the reality of the situation we face. Addressing the state of health care in our country is one of the most important issues to the American people for one simple reason: Our health care system is failing far too many Americans. Tens of millions of our citizens have no insurance and tens of million more are underinsured. For them, all of the medical wonders in the world that our doctors produce might as well not exist. When they fall ill or, worse, when their children are hurt or have a fever or need care, where do they turn? Far too often the answer is: Nowhere.

We need a comprehensive solution to this problem, and the citizens of the country expect and deserve no less. That is a challenge that we must confront together, and it will take time. But today, here and now, we have the chance to make a real dent in one of the most galling and shameful inadequacies of our health care system, and that is the lack of health care for America's children.

Congress created SCHIP in 1997 with broad bipartisan support. As a result, 6

million children currently have health care coverage that they otherwise would not have. In my home State of New York, nearly 400,000 children are enrolled, which is the second-highest number in the Nation.

There is a reason why President Bush pledged that he would fully fund SCHIP while he was on the campaign trail in 2004: It was because this program is enormously effective and enormously popular with the public.

And, yet, there is so much more to be done. Nine million American children still remain without health insurance. It is a situation that remains quite unconscionable.

The bill allows us to take an enormous step forward. It will cover 5 million more children, which will make 11 in total. That would be a truly historic change. Such a vast improvement is reason enough to support the legislation, but the bill does even more to strengthen the health of Americans.

It strengthens Medicare by expanding preventive benefits, as well as mental health services, a matter of grave importance to many of our citizens.

It reduces the costs for seniors and people with disabilities, who also often have low incomes; and it extends the policies that protect access to health care in rural communities, of vital importance to all of us.

What is more, the bill would prevent a proposed 10 percent cut in the Medicare reimbursement to physicians, replacing it with an increase for 2 years. We cannot afford to have more physicians say they can no longer afford to have Medicare patients. This is especially important for districts throughout the country, districts like mine where we are having trouble holding on to good doctors because of financial concerns that until now have not been addressed.

Finally, this bill will raise the tax on the price of cigarettes by 45 cents a pack, a significant preventative health care initiative in its own right. This act alone is projected to save tens of thousands of lives and billions in future health care costs by preventing more than a million children from taking up smoking.

Madam Speaker, in spite of these undeniable benefits and in spite of the overwhelming popularity and accomplishments of this program, SCHIP is under attack.

Sadly, the President proposed to greatly underfund SCHIP, a decision which would severely limit its effectiveness; and Republicans on the other side of the aisle agree with this approach.

But not content to merely limit the reach of SCHIP, we will today witness an attempt on the Republican side to sink this bill entirely, as, indeed, we have seen already several times this morning. In the face of all of the positive results coming from this program and all that it is set to achieve, the harshest rhetoric is going to be cast against it.

Madam Speaker, we all know that my Republican colleagues cannot really believe what they are arguing. Instead, their objective is a different one: to deny the Democrats a chance to talk about yet another legislative accomplishment. They are willing to do it at the expense of the health of the Nation's children, but we will not allow it. And those who argue against passing this bill are arguing in favor of the status quo, the same situation we faced more than 10 years when bold attempts to fundamentally reform our Nation's health care system were subjected to withering attacks.

What was the result? Reforms were blocked, and the national situation grew worse and worse with every passing year of Republican control.

I urge a "yes" vote on this rule and a "yes" on this bill, not only just for America's children but for their parents as well.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the distinguished gentleman from San Dimas, California (Mr. DREIER), the ranking member of the Rules Committee.

Mr. DREIER. "Madam Speaker, this rule is an affront to the democratic process. The underlying bill will harm every single one of the 40 million Americans served by Medicare. At 1 a.m. this morning, with absolutely no meaningful opportunity to review the almost 700-page legislation, the Committee on Rules met to consider the resolution now before us. By now I should be used to it, but we cannot tolerate these continual attacks on democracy.

"When you refuse to allow half this House to speak and to give their amendments, you are cutting out half of the population of the United States from any participation in the legislation that goes on here. It defies reason and it defies common sense that political expediency and newspaper headlines could force this monumental legislation, probably the most monumental that any of us will do in our tenure in the Congress of the United States, to force it through the Chamber with little more than cursory consideration."

Madam Speaker, as eloquent as that statement was, it wasn't mine. That statement that I just read was in fact the statement delivered right here on the floor on June 26, 2003, by the now distinguished Chair of the Committee on Rules, my very good friend from Rochester, New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER).

It was offered during the debate on the Medicare prescription drug bill and the modernization act which passed and has provided access to affordable prescription drugs for seniors for the past several years.

Madam Speaker, if these words that I just offered from the distinguished Chair of the Rules Committee from back in 2003 were true then, they certainly are true now.

As Mr. SESSIONS said, last night, the Rules Committee met for 2½ hours in